

Like Real People Do

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Character:	Edric Blight , Hunter The Golden Guard (The Owl House) , Luz Noceda , Eda Clawthorne , Emira Blight , Amity Blight , everyone bc i have no self control
Additional Tags:	Found Family , eda has become the local parental figure for traumatized teens , slowburn , Enemies to Friends to Lovers , huntric , Goldric , Edric Blight Needs a Hug , Flirty Edric Blight , Gay Disaster Edric Blight , Good Siblings Edric & Emira Blight , Hunter The Golden Guard Needs a Hug (The Owl House) , Eda Clawthorne Adopts Hunter The Golden Guard , Bad but Sad Boy Hunter The Golden Guard (The Owl House) , Darius Adopts Hunter The Golden Guard (The Owl House) , hunter and luz are basically siblings , hunter has no premise of a clue of what love is and has commitment issues , edric has abandonment issues , these work well together/sar , healing fic , Hurt/Comfort , Implied/Referenced Child Abuse , everything is okay in the end , slightly canon divergent , basically hunter and edric meet early season 2 and are secretly friends lol
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Like Real People Do

by [catcoonxd \(catcoonxx\)](#)

Summary

Hunter is the golden guard, a figure of justice and authority, he listens to his superiors and does exactly as told. He does not chase dreams or the boys he sees in them, and he does not know warmth in his cold little world of scars and fear and broken bones.

Edric is a Blight. Not a good Blight, he isn't what his parents want him to be. He's uncaring and mischievous and has a reputation for ruining things, as well as a knack for working his way into places he doesn't belong, like on peoples nerves, and in their hearts. But most of all, he feels alone in his big world of empty hallways and closed doors.

or in which they meet in a dream, and something keeps pulling them back together

"Like real people do" - Hozier

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

"I had a thought, dear, however scary
About that night, the bugs and the dirt
Why were you digging?"

At the border between dream and reality, the sea catches fire.

White, sparkling sand stretches across Edric's line of sight and he pushes himself off the ground, hurriedly brushing the particles from his skin and clothes. He is all too suddenly aware he is dreaming, even if the seaside breeze pushing his hair back and the fine sand under his feet feel all too real. It's unlike anything his unconscious has made up before, and it weighs strangely on his shoulders, tasting foreign on his tongue.

He looks to the horizon, the sun already dipping into the sea and leaving orange and red and scarlet in blue's place, and he's calm, even if he feels out of place.

Without thinking, he wades into the shore, cold sea water laps at his ankles insistently, the wet sand underneath him suddenly like dry concrete. The sea is dark and not very similar to the beaches he knows. There's something ominous and unsettling about it.

"Wh - *who are you* ?" A startled voice behind him demands.

He yelps and moves to run out of surprise, but his ankles catch each other and he smashes into the water. The sand melts away as he sinks, the black water heavy and pulling him down as an endless abyss has suddenly opened beneath him.

Edric tries calling for help but the air is empty from his lungs and thick sludge has lodged in his throat. He desperately tries to wake himself as panic seeps in, but his body only thrashes uselessly and the light of the shore is now miles and miles away in every direction.

He squeezes his eyes shut, even if the darkness matches his reality. He closes them and waits for something. Morning to come, a miracle to come true, something to grasp. He reaches his hand, cold and empty and dying.

Something brushes past his fingertips and his eyes shoot open, staring blurry-eyed through the darkness to see a face, a boy around his age, golden hair and scarlet eyes staring into his own. He moves his hand forward and hesitantly places it in Edric's, gentle and unsure. Edric is hyper aware of the contact, he feels calm in a world of choking water.

Edric's back hits ground and the seawater crashes down, the entire weight of it flattening him against the sand until it all is gone back into the ocean. Air returns around him and he sits up, his clothes and hair dry again somehow. Water and sand shoot up his throat and he heaves it all out, forgetting the boy whose hand is still clutched in his.

"What- Who are you and what are you doing here?" The boy demands again, more persistent this time, face twisting into a scowl as he yanks his hand away.

Edric looks up and forms a comeback but immediately forgets what he was going to say. The boy is absurdly pretty, even frowning. His nose hooked and eyes like daggers, a pink scar splitting his jawline and a strand of blonde hair falling over his eyes. Jagged, like broken glass.

Annoyance blooms in Edric's chest, as well as something else, something he cannot name.

"I'm dreaming," Edric shrugs, indifferent to the boy's anger. "I tried waking up but I couldn't. Not much I can do here, you know."

The boy blinks, anger melting into surprise. "Y -*your* dream? This is *my* dream! I've been alone in this nightmare since I could remember, this is impossible."

Edric grins, and then laughs. "You're not a figment of my imagination then, pretty boy?"

"You're invading my head! This is sacrilege!" The boy barks, his hands rushing to cover his heating cheeks.

"Didn't know I'd *literally* meet the boy of my dreams--"

"Aughh, do you have any idea who I am? I should have you thrown into a--"

"I don't actually," Edric leans forward in the sand. "Why don't you tell me?"

"I can't be affiliated with the likes of you," The boy denies.

"I'll start then. I'm Edric." He almost adds his last name, but he's so worn out by people and their intimidation of the Blight family, that he bites his lip and lets it sink.

The boy is quiet for a few seconds, then begins to say something, but is cut off when lightning splits the sky above them, cannon fire in Edric's chest. Crackling thunder clouds froth and roil, turning sunset to night in a heartbeat.

Edric watches the boy's face shift into raw fear, his eyes snapping to meet Ed's as if he wanted him to save him, as if he were his only hope.

"Listen, this is the first time I've ever seen this dream differently, this has to mean something, *titan*, this *has* to," The boy says frantically, desperately gripping Ed's shoulders. "I need to see you again, I-" He halts himself to come up with a reason but is defeated. But Ed doesn't need a reason, he already knows.

Edric feels beyond himself, and yet he smiles, this time with no humor to accommodate it. "I'll look for you, if you'll look for me. Do you live on the Boiling Isles?"

"Yes, but-" He frantically looks behind him for a second and Edric begins to feel his senses detach as reality demands itself. Rain begins to pour and howl. "There's something you should know--"

Edric tries to listen, his hands grappling onto the boy's arms as he feels himself beginning to wake up. The boy is speaking, lips moving with hurry and desperation, but the wind is so loud now that the words don't reach, the sound dying at his lips.

"I can't hear you!" He cries, but the wind steals his voice away too.

Fire spreads over rising water as it pools under them, the choking sea beginning to reappear. The boy looks horrified, clutching Edric's arms like lifelines as it climbs up.

"I'll find you, I'll-" Edric gasps insistently, as if saying it will make it true. He meant it to assure

the boy but he finds it only for his ears, because now he's terrified too. The wind tugs his body out of the water, pulling him into the sky, and the boy tries harder to keep him down, but his fingertips pass right through him.

The dream shatters.

Edric wakes up in his bed with a violent start, bed sheets tangled around his ankles and sweat bleeding from his skin. His pulse comes heavy and hard. For a moment, he's confused, his vision full of the boy in his dream, of eyes made of flowers and his hair forged from gold. He remembers their hands interlocking, a moment of peace in a world of fire.

Across the room, his twin sister sleeps soundlessly in her bed, her chest rising and falling softly.

He takes a breath, reality instilling itself. "Just a dream, Ed,"

He tries to think of the boy, but all he can remember is his face; the scar on his cheek and mulberry eyes, and how he promised to find him. Maybe a part of Edric wanted to drag him back into his world, because it seemed the boy's was a world of suffocation and confusion and anguish.

He's never seen him around Bonesborough, and he hadn't traveled much outside of it, what's the likelihood of them ever finding each other? Still, he promised, and the growing pain inside his chest was not going to let that go.

The window beside him bleeds moonlight through the curtains and he guesses it must be early in the morning. But everything was always dark and dreary at Blight manor.

The next thing he knew, he was up and standing over his sister's bed, rolling her over to the create room and settling in under the covers beside her.

Having not been the first time either of them have done this, Emira sleepily looks over. "Bad dream?" She mumbles, eyes blinking away dew.

"Yeah," He says, his voice coming out more shaken than he intended.

"Wanna talk about it?" She asks, brushing a hand through his tangled hair comfortingly, automatically jumping into her role as the older twin.

Ed attempts a smile and shakes his head. The boy from the dream was his, and he doubts Emira would understand really anything about it. He decides he won't tell anyone at all.

"Mkay," She whispers. "But if it was about Mom again, you know you can always tell me, Amity and I get them too."

"I know," He siddles closer to her. "I don't remember it, actually. I'm just..."

Emira smiles and grabs his nose, wiggling it until Ed bursts into a smile, swatting her hand away. "Well, nothing bad will happen when you have me, okay? I got your back."

"And I got yours." He finishes. Most of their interactions are never so affectionate, but they both recognize a twin in distress, and they will never leave the other hanging. Emira is independant, rarely coming to Edric with her issues, but there were always nights where he would wake up with her curled up by his side and he'd pretend to be asleep until she's up, but Ed never cared much to hide his clinginess as much as his sisters. Amity also rarely comes to him, instead confiding in

Emira, and as much as that wounds him, he understands.

But Edric is always afraid. Of losing them, of losing the little familiarity he has in a mansion of closed doors and cold, empty hallways. Truthfully, he has few friends, and he usually sticks with Em, too many people treat him like a *Blight*, like someone to fear or hate or worship, all because of his parent's actions. Eventually, he gets tired of weeding through everyone.

Still, he has something- *someone* new to think about, and his familys not going anywhere.

When he drifts back asleep, there is no boy or crashing waves waiting for him, and he instead dreams of nothing at all.

Ed wakes up alone in his sister's bed, and he feels the sharp familiar ache stirring in his gut, loneliness and fear and longing. All of which he could recognize in the boy's fiery eyes.

He wonders if he feels as alone as he does.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

"Why were you digging?
What did you bury
Before those hands pulled me
From the earth?"

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hunter furiously taps his staff against the cold floor , glaring past the people in the market. The day- and the week really- was *not* shaping out to be a good one.

Admittedly, he hasn't been able to focus since his nightmare.

Well, he wasn't entirely sure if that's what it really was anymore. Before, he'd been certain nothing good could come out of that beach dream, but then it changed. Every time he blinks or tries to sleep, he sees a mess of seasick green hair and eyes that seem to contain the sunset itself in them. Maybe he was still living his worst nightmare.

He wants answers. He needs to know how that boy managed to invade his head, how he managed to drive the water away, and why he's *still thinking of him* .

Unsurprisingly, his superiors grew annoyed of his spacing out and assigned him to a lesser job, a weak one.

"I'll look for you ," The boy had said. *"If you'll look for me."*

Hunter drove his hand against his mask. Titan, why was he so *stupid* . He should've never spoken to him, he should've let the boy drown like the dream is supposed to go, he should've let his curiosity drop dead the second he saw him standing in the water.

What he never wanted to admit was the tingling of fear and panic that swept through his nerves when the boy's sunny eyes met his own, when their hands locked and when he smiled. He didn't want to admit he was afraid of the boy named Edric, the boy he was never supposed to meet.

Hes afraid of a lot of things, really. He fears being replaced, and being weak, he fears his uncle, who so happens to be the Emperor, he fears the things that will happen to him if he steps out of line. He should not fear a boy.

Darius was the first to catch on to Hunter's behavior, oftentimes he was the one to look after Hunter as his uncle could never act as a real parent with the amount of work he does. Darius assigned him to patrol the night market for a few nights, "to remind the people down there that the Emperor's coven is always watching". A patrolling job is far beneath Hunter's duties, but he did not have the audacity to object, so he went along, as humiliating as it was.

Tonight was equally boring, there was already tons of illegal activity going on around him, but he just couldn't bring himself to do anything about it when he could not give a shit. It was all minor

anyways, the only thing he really was looking out for were plots against the Emperor coven and of Belos.

He leans his back against the wall, letting out a sigh.

There's a twitching in his side and the little red palisman bird grapples onto his sleeve, chirping up at him.

Hunter quickly pulls his cloak over to hide him. "You can't be here! What would someone do if they saw me with a palisman?" He whisper-shouts.

The bird just happily chirps, not quite understanding Hunter's words.

"Come back here, kid!" A man's voice splits the air, a flurry of a black cloak races by, disappearing into a nearby alleyway, followed closely by the man. For a moment he swore he saw a lock of green hair.

Without thinking, he pushes the palisman back into his coat and follows them into the alleyway, peaking around the corner to view the scene, wondering if it's worthy of his attention.

The man tackles someone to the ground, a boy, a teenager, and with a circle of his fingers, thick, spindeling vines wrap and close around the kid's torso, not budging as he thrashes.

"Now, where's my money kid?" The man demands, his foot pressed flat against the boy's chest, pressing into his neck.

"Heyy, come on, I thought we had a deal?" The boy says, forcing a nervous laugh. Hunter blinks in shock, recognizing the voice instantly.

"Did that deal include faulty fireworks?" The man pulls a box out of his coat and drops it next to the boy's head, barely missing him. "You don't want to know what I do to scammers down here,"

The boy flinches away, his hood falling from his hair.

Seasick green.

"No," Hunter hears himself say it, from what feels like a million miles away. "No. No, titan, no."

The man whips around. "Who's there?"

The boy- Edric- takes the opportunity to free himself, circling his fingers and loosening the vines enough to wiggle free, scampering to his feet.

Hunter is in disbelief, but he has a job to do. He says nothing, merely stepping out from the corner to reveal himself.

"Th- the *golden guard* ?" The man gawks, turning to run away.

Hunter lets him go, and instead turns to Edric, cornering him against the dead end of the alley. Edric glares warily at him, staring down with a mixture of fear and an attempt at intimidation. He stands with his arms pressed against the wall for some kind of support, leaning on one leg, the other bent and loose beside him. *He's injured*.

Hunter goes to speak, but his voice is a million worlds away, and he feels the previous fear he felt before pulse in his chest.

Finally he says, “You realize I have to arrest you now, right?”

Edric blinks at him, scared, but unsurprised. He sighs. “Or, you could let me go?”

“You’re really asking me?”

“At least don’t tell my parents, or punish them- my mom- she’ll-”

Hunter lets the realization settle that Edric doesn’t recognize him from the dream. Even if he’s wearing a mask and cloak, he’d thought his voice maybe would’ve given him away. Maybe he’s already forgotten, or moved on. But Hunter can’t let go of his desperation, and he feels his hands begin to tremble.

“Who are your parents then?” Hunter says, stepping forward until he has him fully backed against the wall.

“You don’t- you don’t recognize me?” Edric blinks.

I do. “Am I supposed to?”

“Uhhh, nope!” Edric shakes his head, cheeks flushing. “You probably don’t know them, I’m just some guy, y’know? M’name’s Ed,”

Hunter inches his face closer until he feels the boy’s soft, quickening breaths against his mask. He knows he’s lying, but he doesn’t necessarily want to get him in trouble. “How old are you, kid?”

“Er, I guess you wouldn’t believe me if I said twenty-five?”

Hunter gives an unimpressed look, even though Edric can’t see it.

“Guess that’s a no... I’m sixteen.” He admits.

“That’s a little young to be running scams and selling...” Hunter steps back, looking over at the box. “...fireworks?”

“Hey, you don’t sound any older than me, *goldie*,” Edric counters, leaning off of the wall to straighten to his full height. “And you’re super short too.”

Embarrassed and angry, Hunter rams his forearm into Edric’s upper chest, slamming him hard against the wall with his staff pointed to his neck, knocking a strained hiss from his throat. Hunter is suddenly reminded that Edric is injured as he glares up at his pained expression, but he doesn’t move. “You’ll remember to know your place when speaking to me, understand?”

Edric gulps, his breath quick and hot. He is much taller than Hunter, appearing more confident and capable, and yet he crumbled quickly under the pressure. “Uh, yep- you got it...”

Even though he is the one who initiated it, who has control over the situation, over the teen he has in front of him, Hunter is all too aware of his heart as it pounds against his ribcage. *You’re afraid of this boy*. “Tell me why I shouldn’t just arrest you right now.”

“I’ll... uhh, I’ll do all your laundry forever! Wait, that sounds super creepy... I’ll give you all my illegal fireworks, and I’ll stop coming down here!” Edric quickly fumbles. “It’ll be like I was never here! I get to keep my clean record, you get to get rid of me. I just- really can’t have my parents angry at me right now,”

Hunter narrows his brow, slightly confused himself on what to do.

Suddenly, the palisman bird peeks out his hood landing right on Hunter's shoulder. He curses under his breath. "Get out of here!" He jiggles his shoulder, releasing his grip on Edric.

"Awww, is this your palisman?" Edric asks, leaning in slightly.

"No! Golden guards don't have palismen, that's absurd." Hunter retorts.

"Seems you don't have a choice in the matter," He says, giving a little scratch to the bird's head. It chirps happily and nuzzles against his finger. "Palismen choose their witches."

"Stop petting him, I don't trust you." Hunter flinches back, grabbing Edric's wrist away. The contact is like pure heat, even through his glove.

"Sorry, I just like animals," Edric grins, sheepishly.

"Don't forget you're trying not to be arrested right now." Hunter growls.

"Right-, um, okay, I don't know what else to say, I just can't be arrested, I'll do anything!"

"How about I call one of your parents, then? If they come to get you, right now, I'll let you off with a warning." Hunter offers. He doesn't know why he's pressuring him so much, if it were anyone else he wouldn't have even bothered talking to them, but he has him now and he still needs answers.

Hunter releases his grip and hands Ed his crow phone from his pocket, letting him take a long minute to dial a number before nervously handing it back.

The line picks up and a woman's sleepy voice comes through. "If this is Tibbles I'm not interested in--"

"Is this Ed's mother?" Hunter quickly interjects. Edric shrinks harder against the brick, trying to create some distance between him and the guard.

"Ed- *Edric* ? As in-" The woman sounds confused for a moment. "Oh- Yep! That's me, mother of Edric, heh, what can I do for you?"

"This is a... Emperor coven scout. Your son is doing illegal activities at the night market, I can let him off with a warning if you come get him. Know that this is a one time thing that will *not* happen again." Hunter explains.

"Ohhh, okay, yes, I'll come and have a serious talk with him," The woman goes on. "Yeah, I'm thinking he's grounded until he graduates, and no more... uh, privileges. None at all, yup."

Hunter lets out an annoyed sigh. "Good. He's also injured, so maybe bring a healing coven kit."

"Gotcha, I'll be there in a few,"

The line dies and Edric slides down against the wall, folding against his knees. He doesn't see any visible injuries anywhere other than a few scrapes on his knees, so he guesses it must be a different issue.

"Your foot must be sprained. Can you walk?" Hunter asks, crouching beside him.

Ed wordlessly attempts to push himself upwards, using the wall as support, but upon trying to take a step with his injured foot, he falls forward, crashing into Hunter and sending them both to the ground.

Edric pushes himself off the guard, quickly becoming panicked. “Sorry! I’m sorry, don’t arrest me, I didn’t-”

To both of their surprises, Hunter breaks into a soft chuckle, no malice or sarcasm hiding behind it. He stands, leaving his staff on the ground, instead offering a hand to Ed. He couldn’t tell what it was, but he doesn’t feel like the Golden Guard with this boy, he doesn’t feel like he had any power or authority like he usually does. Maybe it’s that they’re the same age, or that he can’t help but feel envy for the boy’s carefree attitude.

Edric hesitantly smiles, face flushing as he takes it, using his good leg to push himself to his feet, leaning on the guard for support. “Thanks. Um, can I know your name?”

Hunter is suddenly yanked back to reality, and he fails to meet Ed’s friendly gaze. “You can’t be affiliated with me.” He says, his voice small, and a little sad.

“And why not?”

The fear reemerges, butterflies in his stomach. He feels as seasick as Ed’s hair. He thinks of what he said in the dream “*I can’t be affiliated with the likes of you,*”, maybe he doesn’t want this boy in his world, he doesn’t want him to know him, not the real him, that everyone else seems to hate. When Edric looks at him, he sees the innocence Hunter seems to lack, and he so desperately wants that as far away from his life as possible.

Hunter is quiet, shaking his head. “What’s your deal? Why are you trying to be nice when I’m literally threatening to throw you in jail? I have you *pinned* right now.”

“I don’t feel so pinned, you’re kinda helping me stand actually,” Edric laughs, a boyish laugh that belongs to him only. He’s then quiet for a moment. “It’s just... you’re Belos’s kid, right?”

“Nephew.” Hunter quickly corrects. “What? You think I want your jealousy?”

“Yikes, Titan, no. I just... know what it’s like to be afraid to fail. To disappoint people you love.”

Hunter feels a surge of annoyance and anger and sadness and pain all at once, and he shoves Edric a little too roughly, back into the wall. “You have no idea what it’s like.”

Edric hisses in pain, keeling forward to grip his calf. “I do. Some of it, at least.” He forces his eyes up to stare into the slits of the mask. “I have no doubt you have it worse, having the weight of The Boiling Isles on your shoulders, or whatever. But I *do* know. It seems you haven’t let everyone down yet, but I have. That’s the difference between us, I’m a screw up and everyone knows that, and yet I keep getting punished for it. I know high expectations and I know the punishments for failing to meet them.”

Hunter may have underestimated this guy. Even though his face is covered by the mask, he turns away, feeling dread and sickness and fear bubbling up his throat.

He stays quiet for a minute longer. “I should go. I trust you’ll get home fine. Remember, if I see you again I won’t be so nice.”

“You got it, Goldie.” Ed sighs.

Hunter turns to tell him off for the nickname, but he lets it slide, letting the boy with hair the color of the sea and forest and life enter and leave his vision, a hint, a blemish of a smile under his mask.

He wonders if in another reality, one where he wasn’t cursed to his position as second in command,

where he wasn't so royally screwed, maybe he could've befriended the boy. He could've helped him up and Edric would ask for his name and Hunter would tell him. He could've asked him who he was and he would say "A friend." and it wouldn't be a lie or trick. And the feeling of fear and sickness wouldn't be such a frightening thing.

And maybe it would've been a little nice.

Chapter End Notes

how are we feeling abt the new episode boys

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

"Though you can see when you're wrong
You know you can't always see when you're right"

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“*Okay, what in the world was that ?*” Eda demands, closing the Owl House door sharply behind her, Edric slung like a doll over her shoulder. “Why’d you tell some scout I was your *mom* ?”

“I know, I’m sorry! I didn’t mean any of that to happen, I just- I couldn’t tell my parents,” He explains, voice shaken and lined with dread. “They can’t know.”

“It’s okay, kid.” Eda sighs after a moment, gently laying him on the couch and propping his foot up on a pillow. “I don’t have magic anymore to fix your ankle, even if it is a minor injury. Maybe come up with an alibi to tell your parents when you come home looking like you just came back from dumpster diving and they’ll fix you up,”

“No, no that won’t work,” Edric shakes his head, trembling hands gripping his hair. “Titan, they’re going to kill me, there’s no way they’ll believe anything I say like this!”

“Listen, kid, just breathe, we’ll come up with something. I know how the Blight parents can be, but ” Eda offers a small smile, and Edric nods, slowing his breath. “Why don’t you just stay here tonight and say you’re sleeping over at a friend’s house?”

Edric thinks, then smiles sheepishly. “Thank you, miss Eda. Good thing they think I have friends.”

“Now, you know I’m all for illegal activities, but maybe tone it down a little until you’re grown up, yeah?”

“You’re probably right-”

“*Did I hear illegal activities?* ” A side door bursts open, and Luz is suddenly bouncing on her feet by Eda’s side, accompanied by a strange dog looking thing. Her face is cheery with that flare of determination as per usual, and although Edric hasn’t known the human for very long, he’s fond of her, especially since his little sister adores her.

“Luz! King! You’re supposed to be in bed,” Eda scolds, arms crossing over her chest.

“Kings don’t have bedtimes!” The dog thing- King squeaks, boasting it’s little chest from atop Luz’s shoulder.

“What’s Amity’s brother doing here?” Luz pokes Ed’s nose. “Hi Ed!”

“Hey Luz,” Edric grimaces, slightly embarrassed.

“Uhhh, it’s a long story, but he’s injured and sleeping here tonight,” Eda explains, pulling a blanket

from a closet and tossing it to Edric.

“Ooooo, we can have a slumber party!” Luz breaks into a smile, already grabbing a second blanket. “You in, King?”

“Only if you read me more Azura later!”

“Deal!”

“Ugh, you kids have fun, I’m going to sleep. Wake me if you burn the house down or something.” Eda says through a yawn, stalking sleepily up the steps.

“Sleepover time!”

As much as Edric appreciates Luz’s enthusiasm, he can’t help but feel his head begin to throb from the pain in his foot and the thoughts swarming his brain. But maybe a distraction *would* help. As much as the Golden Guard interests him, he knows that his world was a million worlds away from his, and a thousand times different. He wants to know more, but there's nothing he can do about that now.

“You in, Edric?” Luz casts a grin. “We can play board games and have snacks and tell scary stories!”

“Sure, why not?” Ed shrugs with a smile. He doesn’t go to a lot of ‘slumber parties’, not that anyone his age would ever call them that, so maybe it is just a nice opportunity to have fun. And maybe he didn’t expect to hangout with his little sister’s friend/crush, but she's always been naturally friendly, so it wasn’t like he was against it.

“Can *I* join?” A voice with the grace of nails on chalkboard butts in. The owl face extends like a tube over to the three, Edric staring at it a little confusedly.

“Hooty, can you even *play* board games?” King argues, already dragging a human board game out from under the couch.

“Sure, I can, hoot!” Hooty boasts. “I’ve been practicing.”

“What is this game anyways?” Edric asks Luz, the top of the box reading ‘Monopoly’.

“The horrors of modern day capitalism.” She says, dramatically, imitating gagging.

“I have no idea what that is, but I can roll with that,”

After a long and eventful game of arguments and betrayal, Hooty somehow managed to win, claiming to be a natural business savvy man, and after the power and money had gotten to his head, Luz and Edric both agreed to avoid board games for the rest of the night.

King and Hooty were both sound asleep when Edric looked over at Luz.

“So, you and Mittens, huh?” He gave a smirk.

Luz’s cheeks immediately flushed scarlet and she gave a nervous laugh. “Hah, so funny you mention that,”

“Just trying to help move things along,” He leaned back against the couch, moving the bowl of popcorn off his stomach and onto the floor. “You guys are really taking it slow, huh?”

“We’re uh... heh,” Luz flushes, failing to fathom anything up. “Well this isn’t fair, what about you, huh?” Luz turned to him, her signature ‘mischief’ face on. “Anyone special in Brother Blight world?”

Edric hesitated, his smile dropping slightly. He thought of the boy from his dreams, the one who begged him to save him, and then he thought of the Golden Guard, who denied his help at once. He was almost sure they were the same person after giving it some thought, but he had no way to prove it.

“I-...” He clears his throat, heat rising to his cheeks. “It’s no one, really.”

Luz gasps and turns her body to fully face the cough. “Is it Jerbo?”

“What? No!” Edric laughs at the absurdity, furiously shaking his head.

“Viney?”

“No way, don’t tell my sister I said this, but she and Em totally have a thing,” Edric grins. “Plus I also don’t like girls.”

Luz giggles, imitating a zipper over her mouth. “Well then who is it?”

Edric’s smile loosens into a frown, almost sadly. “I told you, it’s really no one. But can I ask something kind of random that has nothing to do with the current conversation topic?”

“Shoot.”

“You’ve met the Golden Guard, right?”

Luz looks at him, eyes narrowing. “Why are you asking about him?”

“Uh-”

“You’re not like... *crushing* on the *golden guard*, are you?” Luz turns to look at him, and her face reading something along the lines of hurt and shock.

Edric shakes his head immediately, but he feels his face become hot. No, he was not crushing on him, he was curious. Just curious. “No! Titan, no, I just- was wondering. I hear he’s dangerous, I just wanted to hear from someone who’s met him, y’know?”

Luz sighs and shrugs. “I mean, he grew up in the *Emperor’s coven*, and he’s the youngest Golden Guard like- *ever*, he’s not exactly easy to fight with,” She says, but there’s no boast to her words, she says it like it’s something unfortunate. “And he’s a complicated dickhead who probably hasn’t had a lot of decisions made by or for himself, but I’m not giving him any credit beyond that. He just...”

Edric frowns, placing a hand to her shoulder. “I’m sorry, Luz, I shouldn’t have asked.”

“Wanna know a secret, though?” She smirks at him, her mood shifting. “He’s actually magicless without his staff thingy.”

Edric blinks in surprise. “Really?”

“And you wanna know something else?”

“What?”

“I think he’s got good in him.” Luz winks.

Edric flushes into a smile, something soft slipping in his eyes. “You think?”

“Yeah. Well, I think everyone’s got good in them, but maybe that’s just me being hopeful.” Luz shrugs. “But there were a few moments he let his guard down, and he was just... a normal kid. And he let me escape, kinda. But maybe I’m wrong.”

“No, you’re right.” Edric says, a little too quickly, because he also remembers a moment in the alleyway where the Golden Guard wasn’t the Golden Guard or some esteemed emperor coven official, he was just some kid with a mask. He clears his throat and corrects himself. “I mean, I think you are. Seems you’ve had luck befriending your enemies so far, right?”

“If you’re talking about Amity...” Luz smiles at the carpet, a smile with no humor, just love.

“Yeah, see? Look how well you two are turning out,” Edric snickers.

Luz grins and nods, then sends Ed a wink. “Sounds like your making friends with enemies too,”

“No clue what you’re talkin about.” Edric says with a hidden grin and leans back on the couch, readjusting his foot on the pillow. The throbbing and pain had gone down since Luz got some ice for it, but it was still hurt and definitely would need a few days to heal. He knows Viney had been teaching Emira some healing magic, though, so maybe she could help him.

“Why don’t we call it a night? Looks like your foot needs some rest.” Luz suggests.

“Yeah, probably.” He was awfully tired.

“Do you want a change of clothes or something?” She asks, gesturing to his filthy cloak.

“Nahh, I’ve slept in mud before, this is good,”

“You’ve what-”

Chapter End Notes

just a short little sweet chapter before things get juicy >:)

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

"You're so ambitious for a juvenile
But then if you're so smart tell me,
Why are you still so afraid?"

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hunter doesn't remember the last time he's slept.

Forty hours ago, at least. Maybe forty-five. He feels weighted, a thousand pounds heavier than he should. Lights keep blinking in his eyes, and he's trying to remember if witches can sleep standing up. Hunter's always tried to lead by example. If the scouts see him pass out, it won't be good for morale when everyone's already more stressed out than ever. Plus, he'll feel royally idiotic.

Maybe he wouldn't be so anxious if he hadn't disobeyed direct orders from his uncle and gone to Eclipse Lake, but was he really going to do? He can be replaced, Belos said so himself.

He recalls his interaction with his uncle in the portal room, the night he last slept. The soft glow spilling softly into the tall room. Belos was unmasked, and that was rare in itself. Hunter rarely sees his face anymore, but he supposes he understands.

"The titan has big plans for you." He had told him, like he always tells him. Somehow that never assured him at all. It's like his entire life has led up to it, and he feels nothing but dread. He knows his uncle and what he's capable of. Big plans could mean absolutely anything. It could mean the worst.

He never thought he'd get captured by The Owl Lady of all people, even if she has managed to evade the law for thirty years and can turn into a harpy woman on command. He feels a hint of anger. This was her fault. And the human's. He knows he got laid off from this job because of his recent behaviors and... distractions, but he was finally ready to prove he was useful again, and this is what became of him. The Blight girl's abomination goo strapped around his arms and torso.

He still sees the boy- Edric when he tries to sleep, and he remembers the conversation inside the cave veins where he came to a realization, a stupid one at that.

"You know," the Owl lady had said with a grin. "Luz told me about a trip to Latissa where she met someone very *interesting*. A beat up blonde with no magical powers."

Hunter frowned, furiously glaring at his feet.

"She called him- and these are her words: 'a bad, but sad boy'." She finished, and she and her dog demon thing erupted into laughter.

"If I ever see that human again..." His face flushed, slightly humiliated. He knew he could have gone back after her if he really wanted, take the palismen and have Belos's faith in him restored, but a part of him didn't, the stupidest part of him, could only watch her leave.

A part of him didn't like the way the human looked at him with disappointment.

"Watch it." The Blight girl prodded his back with her palisman staff, Hunter raising an eyebrow.

"Are *all* you Blight's this uptight?"

"What's that supposed to mean?" She hissed, warningly.

"I would say the *men* in that family are a little too... downtight, if you know what I mean," The owl lady said, and the demon dog nodded in agreement.

"Are you calling my brother *dumb* ?"

"Not *dumb* . And well I was referring to Alador but Edric works too, I guess--"

Edric.

Edric .

He stopped dead in his tracks, his foot freezing mid-step and sending him faceplanting into the cave ground. The pain didn't even register for a few seconds as he was paralysed in disbelief.

"Edric," He said quietly, as if confirming what he just heard.

The Blight girl immediately whips around, flipping him roughly on his back with her foot. "What did you just say?" She bit out, angrily.

Hunter was short of words, his lips fighting to form something to say but nothing coming out. His head was suddenly swarming with questions and the thoughts he'd been blocking out for weeks.

"Your *brother* ," he realized with a sudden rush.

Edric is a *Blight* .

He knew the Blight's had three children, but he'd mostly only seen the youngest, the young girl that was usually at the showcases for Blight industries. The other two he knew were also twins, but he had never really seen their faces. Everything had suddenly fit, the reason Edric hadn't wanted his parents to know he'd been almost arrested, the reason he claimed to know a taste of Hunter's high achieving world.

Hunter still shudders every time he remembers. Edric is a Blight. *Titan, his parents work for you* .

Another reason they cannot be friends, cannot be anything.

That was another thing that kept him up at night. There was something truly devastating about being unallowed to spend any energy on him. But even if they couldn't be friends, he was almost tied to him.

A string made of dreams.

A scout casts him a worried look as they hurry past, arms full of bandages, disappearing down the corridor, undoubtedly to tend to the other scouts injured in the infirmary.

There's too much to think about, too much to process. A portal to set up, things to investigate, information to gather. Two of his scouts are unaccounted for. His uniform feels too tight around his neck, itchy against his skin.

Titan , he's tired.

The gem from his staff swims in front of his eyes, a hundred thousand different colors and somehow nothing can match the vibrance, and Hunter remembers the first time he laid eyes on it. And all of a sudden, he is fourteen again, not yet a part of the world around him, lungs full of brine and wind instead of smoke and the stench of blood.

Golden Guard , a voice says, in his head.

I know , he snaps back. *I know I'm the Golden Guard, damn it.*

Golden Guard , the voice repeats insistently.

Shut up, I know—

“Golden guard... *Hunter* .”

Hunter jerks upright, hand flying to his staff.

Steve steps back, hands up slightly. He's sure to be tired too, most of everyone in the coven is right now, but he gives a kind nod. “I'm sorry to bother you sir,” He says, not sounding terribly sorry at all. “Forgive me if I'm out of line but-... you should rest. I'll handle the rest of tonight. You can go.”

Hunter doesn't even hear him at first, blinking at him, eyes like burning glass. “No that's alright,” He says at once, before he can fully comprehend what Steve is asking.

“C'mon, you need it,” Steve pats Hunter's shoulder. “Don't even agree, just go to your room and sleep, okay?”

“No, I can't *do* that,” Hunter snaps, a little more sharply than intended. His memories and thoughts are all out of order, but he knows he has a job to do, he can't afford to sleep. He can't afford being away for even a second. “Thank you for your concern, Steve.” He adds, in a much gentler tone.

“Hey, look at me,” Steve lowers himself slightly to Hunter's height, and plops his hand into Hunter's hair, and it's right then when Hunter realizes he's not wearing his mask. “There's nothing you can do right now, come on, I'll escort you.”

Hunter doesn't argue, and lets himself be pulled by a hand on his back in the direction of his room, his sleep-deprived brain deciding it easier than putting up a fight.

When he gets there, Steve offers a smile and another pat to the head. “Good night, sir.”

“G'night,” Hunter hears himself say, and he watches Steve walk away.

Steve's barely an adult, barely more than a kid, just like the rest of them. Just like Hunter. They're just kids, all of them - kids with staffs and magic and power. Kids ankle deep in blood and ash.

Before he knows it, he's throwing off the scratchy layers of his uniform and collapsing in his bed, trying to fight his sleepiness away. He didn't remember what time of day it was and he was too out of it to really care. And he was also *freezing* .

And then he starts hearing shit.

It's not the first time he'd gone a few days without sleep, he's never alarmed when he hallucinates, but he was *not* at all prepared for Edric-fucking-Blight in his ear.

“ *Don't you look awful?* ” The voice is far away, yet close. Very, very close.

Hunter presses his fingers firmly against his eyes, feeling genuine distress.

“Ignoring me? How rude.” Edric- no, not Edric- says again. The voice carries itself the way Ed does, with the sarcastic, mischievous glint, but this is *not* Edric.

“Leave me alone.” Hunter growls quietly to himself, not to the voice. He is not talking to a voice.

“You don’t really want me to leave you alone, do you?” It says, and Hunter is mortified. *“You’re thrilled to hear my voice,”*

Hunter shakes his head, eyes burning like there are glowing-hot cinders. He’s on his feet suddenly, pacing around his floor like a madman. “No, no no no, I’m not,”

“Was there something else you wanted to do in the alleyway?”

“No, Titan, no, no no no-”

“Is there another reason you can’t be around me? Something else you’re afraid of?”

“Stop it !”

Hunter loses his balance and collapses against his desk, knocking almost everything off and hitting his forehead hard against the wood.

He can’t muster up a single muscle to aid him in picking himself up, so he lays like a ragdoll against the floor, a million pounds weighing down on him, tying each and every one of his limbs to the ground.

With each blink his vision doubles and eventually, he can’t open his eyes at all, and he loses his grip, something resembling the open abyss of the ocean forcing him down.

And then he hears him again.

“Goldie, wake up!” Edric says, urgently, his hands touching his shoulders but not really touching them, just in the way dreams make you think they are. This voice is different from the hallucination, it doesn’t ooze sickly sweetness the way Fake Ed did. Real Ed could never sound so cruel. Maybe when they first met he mistook that flaunt of sarcasm and confidence for something else, but he knows Edric now, maybe. Maybe not as well as he’d like.

Hunter rolls on his back, squinting tiredly up at him.

“Goldie, we’re in a dream again, I think,” He says, almost a little too quickly for Hunter to understand. “I don’t recognize it here,- do you?”

Hunter turns his head slightly to look around, and tall trees and undergrowth wrap around them in a tight jungle, almost the same shade of green as Ed’s hair, but not quite cold enough. The sky is a solid skarlet, no sunset or cloud or moon or sun, just blood red.

“I’m not sure,” Hunter shakes his head, catching on to Edric’s panic. “I don’t recognize it.”

“I don’t think this is a nightmare, then,” Edric says, but Hunter can’t share the confidence. “I think it’s safe,”

I’m never safe, I’m never safe.

“Here, Goldie,” Edric extends a hand, and Hunter glances warily at it, before Edric lets out an

annoyed groan and grabs his wrist and forces him up.

There's a point where Hunter almost thinks the contact is warm, solid, real.

Hunter lets a long breath out of his nose. "Hunter. Just- my name's Hunter. You can stop calling me- ... wait-" Hunter suddenly snaps his head over, horrified. "You know-?"

"That you're the golden guard?" Edric raises an eyebrow. "Duh. And you could've told me it was you before I completely embarrassed myself in that alleyway."

"How did you-"

"Amity told me the Golden Guard was an angry blonde kid with a scar and a bird. But I had my suspicions before that, too, of course." Edric explains, shrugging.

"And she's your sister, which makes you a Blight." Hunter says disdainfully.

Edric nods. "I was a Blight before her, to be fair."

Hunter almost smiles. "Guess both of our covers are blown then."

"Guess so." Edric sighs. "Anything else I should know then, Hunter?"

Hunter frowns and is quiet for a long time. "We can't be friends."

Edric nods, as if expecting that answer, that truth. He's frowning and nodding, until he stops and smiles. "Says who?"

"Says the laws of the universe."

"Really? There's a note from specifically the universe somewhere that says 'Hunter and Edric can't be friends'?" Edric laughs, and Hunter's insides go funny.

"Why do you think we *can* be friends, then?" Hunter shifts towards him.

"Because I like you." He says, like it wasn't something so crazy to do. "And we met *twice* in our dreams now, that's gotta mean something. Like you said."

"I was scared, I wouldn't have said that if I wasn't scared." Something about admitting that felt extremely wrong to Hunter. He was scared of a lot of things, of Belos, of failing, of Edric Blight. To him, it was worse than a normal confession. Worse than a scream.

"You are so difficult, you know that?" Edric's foot twists in the grass, and he shoots a look.

Hunter believes he's heard those words all his life, but Edric seemed to say them with a sort of admiration.

Edric jolts slightly, and his figure becomes muddled.

"Shit- I'm waking up, listen to me, Hunter," He grabs Hunter's sleeve, his touch quickly fading, just like it had done the first time. "Meet me tomorrow in that alley, the one we officially met in, okay? Sunset."

And then there was a flicker, a blemish in the space where he had been, and then it was like he was never there at all.

Chapter End Notes

bruh i hate dream sequences someone tell me how else to symbolically write that
hunter likes men

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

i didn't have an ending planned for this one so excuse me if it's a little abrupt lol also this one is a lot longer enjoy!

The sky glows a scarlet gold as Edric slips into the alleyway, a bright color that leaves red clinging to the inside of his eyelids even after he's looked away. He wasn't sure if Hunter had even heard or retained his message, if he was only coming to kill him or arrest him. But he's not too worried about that, he knows he would be dead already if The Golden Guard really wanted that. He was more worried if he wouldn't come at all.

He sighs, seeing that the alley is empty - just dark and dingy and smelling vaguely of something curdling and sweet, like rotting meat. But that's usually how the night market area smells anyways. For a few long, horrible minutes he's along with his thoughts and the clacking of his shoe tapping against the stone ground.

And then the world spins nauseatingly, and he's suddenly facing outwards, one of his arms twisted behind his back rather painfully. There is a hand at Edric's throat, fingertips brushing against Adam's apple.

"If I had my staff," Hunter says above his ear, very softly, "you'd be dead."

And then the shock fades, and Edric grabs Hunter's wrist and flips him bodily over his shoulder.

Hunter hits the ground with a wheeze. He hits hard and heavy, and for a second Edric feels bad. He's been friendly with Edric recently, after all. But then he's up again, so quick and graceful it's like he was never down in the first place.

Then Edric's annoyed again.

Hunter's cloak is missing, his blonde hair a mess, face dirty with rug burns across his cheek. His gloves are missing and bandages are wound up under his sleeves. He's a mess, but still radiates danger and pride. He could be trapped, backed against a corner, and still look calm and confident and deadly.

Edric understands, suddenly. Why they call him the Golden Guard.

"So," Ed says, cheerfully. He tries not to seem affected from seeing Hunter's face officially without the mask. "Seems you're feeling better."

Hunter snorts. "What's that supposed to mean?"

There's a noticeable shift in Ed's mood and tone. "I know what happened at Eclipse Lake." Edric says, maybe less careful than he should be. "I know you took Luz's key." He can't exactly tell if Hunter's shocked, but he's quiet, and that should be warning to back off, but he keeps going. "I'm not here to grill you, Goldie. But I am telling you to stay away from my sisters and their friends, got it?"

“And since when are you giving me orders?” Hunter holds his chin high.

“Since you decided to mess with my baby sister and her girlfriend.”

“In case she didn’t tell you, *she beat me* .”

“And you still got your way.”

“You don’t understand,” Hunter shakes his head, something of a crazed, angry, humorless laugh escaping his lips. “You *don’t understand* .” He says more clearly.

“Listen,” Edric steps forward. “Just... You don’t have siblings, so *you* don't understand. Just stay away from them.”

“Titan, you Blights are so protective of each other.”

“We’re a package deal.”

“You’re *insufferable* .”

“Yeah, Goldie?”

“ *Hunter* ,” The guard snaps. “Just call me Hunter.”

“Okay,” Edric rolls a grin. “Hunter.” The name sparks electricity on his tongue, as if it really were dangerous.

Hunter says nothing and they stare at each other for a long moment, then both open their mouths at the same time. Hunter’s snaps closed. Edric says, “Aren’t you a little young to be the Golden Guard?”

“I’m sixteen,” he says, affronted.

“Really.” Edric raises an eyebrow.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Hunter’s had this conversation once or twice, and most people figure out to back off at this point.

Edric says, “You’re scrawny,” But there’s something else there too, something resembling concern.

And then Hunter is in motion, swinging a punch. Edric sees it coming and catches his wrist, twists – Hunter twists fluidly along with him, pulling his arm free and swinging his leg forward, hooking one of Edric’s feet out from under him. Edric flips ungracefully, but springs back up with his hands, and stumbles up back against the wall of the alleyway, just like when they first met. *No you met before that* , Edric reminds himself.

They stare at each other warily.

“Again,” Edric says.

Hunter moves towards him, and his fighting style isn’t like anything Edric has ever seen before – he fights almost like he’s dancing, with the sweeping, waltz-like gestures they must teach soldiers in the Emperor’s coven but without the stiff blockiness, instead moving like the wind itself. His blows are quick and hard, and Edric takes more than he gives.

But he gives a lot, too.

Hunter outclasses him, but Edric has his own tricks.

They spar for what feels like hours, Hunter attacking and Edric swinging around him to land blows against his shoulders, his back, his sides. Hunter is the most skilled partner Edric has ever really fought with, by far – fluid, natural, deadly. Even if he hasn't sparred too much outside family.

But Edric can tell – he can see. The tension in his muscles, the careful twists to his mouth, the look in his eyes. Hunter's holding back.

It ends like this; with Edric breathing heavily on his back against the dirty alley floor, Hunter's knees on either side of his stomach, his thighs burning hot against Edric's sides, that horrible-beautiful-frightening electricity screaming through both of their veins. He's warm against Edric's torso, his fingers even warmer where they hold Edric's wrists to the floor.

"Woah," Edric says, maybe only to himself, catching his breath. And then, "Wow! That was so fun, Goldie! How did you learn to do that?"

Hunter stares down at him, his eyes wide and confused, his eyebrows pushed together in the middle.

He's with the Emperor, he could be tricking you, Edric's mind points out, rather late. *He could kill you right now*.

Instead, Hunter stands up, dusts himself off, and extends a silent hand to Edric. He takes it and allows Hunter to lift him up.

"You're good," Edric enthuses, bouncing up and down on the balls of his feet.

"You're lousy," Hunter grumbles.

Edric reels back. "Excuse me?" he gasps. "Okay then, let's go again. I'll crush you this time."

Hunter throws his hands into the air, looking absolutely baffled. "Why are we here, Edric?"

Edric opens his mouth, probably to ask another question instead of answering. And then he blinks. Closes his mouth. Opens it again. "You said my name," he marvels, all sorts of things scrambling in his gut.

The tips of Hunter's ears flush pink and he straightens his back in surprise.

"I," he sputters. "I – well – I would – it doesn't *mean* anything – what – what the hell, you dumbass?"

Edric steps forward, Hunter stumbling back. "Say it again," he says.

Hunter scoffs, "What?"

"Cmon, say it again,"

"What? Why?"

"Just do it!"

"Stupid Edric," Hunter snaps. "Stupid, stupid, stupid Edric."

“Well, that’s not very nice,” He snickers. “Hunter.”

“Why the hell are we here?” Hunter nearly shouts, sounding almost like a plea.

Edric beams, and Hunter glares at him, ears nearly scarlet now, and for a fleeting moment, they are not in the crossfires of a war. They are in those strange, dimly lit places confined to their dreams, two children pulled together by Hunter’s bad luck and Edric’s bad choices and something else.

Something weird and light and different.

But they’re not little children. They’re sixteen and Edric is not supposed to talk to Hunter, the Golden Guard. They’re sixteen, and people are dead because of Hunter and his uncle. They’re sixteen, and Edric is stupid.

Edric has always been stupid over Hunter.

“Because I wanted to see you,” Edric says at last.

Hunter’s face alters. Something slips in his expression, something not careful or guarded, Edric hadn’t realized it was there until it’s gone.

“You’re unbelievable.” Hunter clenches his fist, turning to leave before Edric catches his sleeve.

“Hunter,” He says, serious. “Hunter, do you hate me?”

Hunter pauses, a glimpse of Edric’s almost hurt face forcing him to a stop. He swallows roughly, and Edric tries hard to imagine what he could be thinking.

“We don’t know each other,” Hunter says, quietly. “And I already told you we can’t be friends.”

Edric hums. “Why not?”

“You know why.”

Edric is suddenly a little resentful, but not towards Hunter. “Because of Belos? Because you’re in over your head with your stupid *Golden Guard* shit? Because my family works for your’s and you’re scared?”

Hunter pulls his arm away. “I *am* scared.” He says, hardly audible at all.

“I am too,” Edric says, low and fierce. “But aren’t you a little scared of living your whole life and never enjoying it?”

Hunter turns away. “Yeah,” And Edric’s words ache in his head. “But it will never be that easy. You can act out all you want, don’t drag me down with you. Some of us *want* a future. Excuse me if I don’t want to ruin it for some brat who rebels to feel in control but will end up just like their parents anyways.”

Hunter looks away at his feet for a few seconds, and then looks up, back at Edric, and his face is the most angry and hurt he’s ever seen him. It’s the first time he’s really noticed how sharp his features are, his eyebrows black and pointed and creased in the middle, eyes sharp daggers, nose upturned and narrow, and jawline dark and slender below his ears. Hunter instantly feels guilt.

Hunter quickly turns back to him, grabbing his wrists. “I don’t hate you, Edric Blight. I-...”

“You confuse me,” Edric mumbles. He quickly turns away to swipe at the pinpricks building in his

eyes. "One night you're begging me to find you, the next you're throwing me against a wall and telling me to get lost... Can't you just say what you're really thinking?"

"*You confuse me*," Hunter hisses, pushing his shoulder lightly. "You met me like three times and now you're acting like your trying to *marry* me or some shit--"

Edric kicks him in the shin. "Dick!"

Hunter's palisman extends into a staff and he pushes Edric back against the wall, holding it at his neck. "I told you to remember your place with me," his voice is raised and wild like fire.

Edric keeps his breathing level. "So, you *did* have your staff." He grins. "And I thought we were past this 'authority' shit. We *can* be friends, you know."

"Do you have a death wish, Blight?" Hunter presses the wood of the staff against his skin, cold and dangerous, then drags it forward up his chin, forcing it up slightly.

"Maybe just a bit," Edric says breathily, a smirk pulling at his lips. "But I'm not so sure you scare me anymore."

"I scare you?"

Edric looks at him, his eyes with the ignition of a flame alight in them, and his chipped ear, the emperor's sigil emblazoned on his wrist just peeking out of the bandages.

"No." He decides. He feels adrenaline, he feels alive. But fear is not the word for it.

Hunter's grip falters and his shoulders slack.

Edric stands off the wall, leaning into Hunter. "Do I scare *you*?"

Hunter moves his foot to step away, but decides against it, instead stepping the tiniest bit forward. "No." He says, like a realization.

There is a million miles in the inches between them, running tight with electricity and confusion.

"Then tell me the real reason," Edric says. "The reason you don't want to be around me. Either you hate me, or you're scared of me."

Hunter shakes his head. "I'm scared," He says. "I'm scared I *don't* hate you. Because I know I'm supposed to."

"Then don't hate me." Edric says.

"You make it really hard, you know."

Edric tries to look angry, but a laugh forces its way up and he leans back against the wall. "Haven't you ever had a friend before?"

"Well, I--" He holds his breath for a few seconds. "I... I have *Steve*, I guess..."

"He's your age?"

Hunter shakes his head, a little miserably, but more embarrassed. "I don't have time for friends, you know, I have *responsibilities* -"

Edric's arms are suddenly wrapped tightly around Hunter's waist, lifting him off the ground, with only a little struggle, and spinning around in a loopy circle. Hunter writhes beneath his grip, hands gripping Edric's shirt and protesting loudly in confusion.

"What on titan are you doing?" Hunter gasps, legs kicking. "Why are you attacking me?"

"It's a hug!" Edric beams.

Edric lets him down, but he keeps his arms around him, pressing firmly against his back, and Hunter calms down, his hands coiled into Edric's shoulders now loosening. Hunter smells of citrus, like ginger and cough medicine and dingy, closed in rooms. He smelled like smoke and the danger of fire, however warm.

"Well, *this* is a hug, actually." Edric says softly. "Haven't you hugged before?"

"Are you crazy? This is... vulnerable and weak..." Hunter says, shifting awkwardly against his embrace. "We don't-... *I* don't do this."

"It doesn't feel nice to you at all?"

Hunter tenses, then melts slightly. "I'm confused,"

"What else haven't you done?" Edric pulls away, but both of their hands linger around the other. "You're sixteen and you've barely done anything at all,"

"What? I've done loads of things. Have *you* been abandoned on a mountain miles away from any society with nothing but yourself and made it out alive?" Hunter argues.

"That's not what I mean. I mean stuff like having *fun*; sleepovers, dates, kissing, parties, you know?" Edric smiles, a little concerned. "What you just said was like *war* stuff. That's not really a thing we're supposed to worry about right now..."

"Listen, Edric, I'm not like you." Hunter drops his hands and steps away, head hung low. "I have a coven to look after, I *do* have 'war stuff' to worry about. Golden guards don't make friends with freaks he meets in dreams and alleyways."

Edric doesn't look remotely sad or hurt. "Guess you're the first then," He says, smirking, as if making friends with the Golden Guard was his next prank on the world. "Just for a moment, ignore what Belos wants you to do. What you think you should do next for your coven, what you're worried about, all of it. Just focus on me. We're having fun, right? Do you like hanging around me?"

It's a complicated question when it shouldn't be. More complicated than Hunter could begin to explain or comprehend himself. He doesn't have fun, and he doesn't exactly know what to compare it to, and he doesn't understand himself with Edric. Every time he's with him, he seems to break all of the internal and external rules he's developed over the years, and he can never tell how he feels about that. He never knows anything when he's with Edric.

"I don't know what friends do, I don't know-"

Edric barks a laugh. "It's not like a legal obligation, man. Friends kinda mean that you look out for one another-"

"Like an alliance?"

"Yeah- but not like *war* allies, it's more like you help a friend because you *care* about them, but not because you owe them or anything."

“You care about me?” Hunter tilts his head.

Edric grins. “Sure I do. I get attached easily, you know.”

“But when we were fighting earlier, that wasn’t very friendlike,”

“We weren’t really trying to hurt each other, it’s different. It’s kinda like training for an actual fight. But uh, you shoving me into walls and threatening to arrest or kill me is *not*... friendlike.”

“So... If were friends, then I protect you?” Hunter pulls his staff back out, holding it as if ready to attack someone.

Edric’s face instantly flushes. “It’s not- It’s not like being a *bodyguard* , it just means if one of us needs help we would help them. But friends also like- hangout and stuff and do things that are fun or enjoyable.”

“Like what?”

“Like walking around, eating, cooking... I don’t know Hunter, I don’t exactly have a lot of friends either.”

Hunter reels back. “ *You* don’t have friends?”

Edric’s cheeks redden. “I *have* friends. I just... don’t hang out with them a lot or have too many.”

Hunter looks puzzled.

“I just like to stick with my sister. It’s just tiring to be... attached to someone and then find out they never actually liked you.”

Hunter seems absolutely baffled. “Who would do that? Why would someone fake that?”

“I’m a Blight. I’m rich and my parents are well known and people think they can use that. But then they figure out I’m not who they wanted me to be and leave.”

“If I’m your friend now, then I’ll protect you from them,” Hunter says in a voice that Edric thinks came from his years of working for the Emporers coven, the determined, maybe angry tone he’d only really expect to hear from a war general. His hand claps Edric’s shoulder. “I’ll beat them up and have them thrown into the dingiest jail cell in the Boiling Isles.”

There is a feeling in Edric’s chest like falling off something tall, and Hunter's hand is tethering him, somehow. Anchoring him in place. His heart is beating so very fast, like little taps against his ribcage and he can hear his pulse in his ears. He knows this feeling. This feeling is what will get him killed one day.

He bites out a grin, a little sudden, but disarming. “Yeah, okay. Then I hope you know I got your back, too.”

“Oh please, and who will *you* protect me from?”

“My itty bitty sister got you pretty good, don’t act so high and mighty,” Edric laughs, knocking an elbow in his side.

The corner of Hunter’s lips quirk but then he quickly straightens it.

“And being friends also means you can laugh at my jokes,” Edric teases.

“And if they’re not funny?” Hunter returns an elbow back into Edric’s side and Edric wheezes a laugh. It’s comfortable in that moment, they both let themselves forget they were fighting just a minute ago, that a bit ago they were The Golden Guard and the Blight Brother, neither without many friends. Edric has Jerbo and Viney, but he never really speaks to them without Em. He doesn’t really have *any* friends without Em. He’s glad he now has one friend that isn’t tied to his family, one he made all on his own.

Making friends was never Edric’s forte, but he’s making an effort here. He *wants* to eat garbage food with Hunter, he *wants* to go see movies with him, and study for tests, and go to parties only to end up talking outside. He wants to be normal, dumb teenagers with him. He also wants to know why Hunter’s eyes are older than the rest of him. Maybe he can see a little of himself in there too.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

"Well you can't get what you want
But you can get me
So let's set out to sea, love
'Cause you are my medicine
When you're close to me"

Chapter Notes

HI i know i sort of forgot about this fic, but if anyones still reading i still want to do my best to continue it. this chapters much shorter than usual but it's just to get me back in the rhythm, i have a lot of plans still! i might be skipping around more so if it's a little jumpy it's just because i'm trying to get to all the good stuff i have planned. for everyone still here HII how are we feeling

Hunter cannot begin to fathom why he agreed to this. Why he agreed to anything with the guidance of Edric-fucking-blight. He can't even justify it to himself why he decided to be friends with him, he doesn't even know the reason.

Friends.

That didn't sound right. The Golden Guard doesn't have friends. Most of the scouts were friends with each other, or sometimes they still were friends with people outside the coven. But Hunter? Someone of his level has more important things to worry about. Friends make you weak and Hunter is weak enough as is.

Lilith Clawthorne was always trying to best him before her betrayal, looking for every chance to prove he was really just a child. Kikimora is no different. Most of the scouts don't bother with him, he's too young, too serious, and at the same time somehow too old. He was born and raised in the emperor's coven, his eyes have seen hundreds of lives end, his eyes have seen blood and gore and it has made him about twenty years older than his body.

Edric is somehow different.

Edric Blight cracked his lock before he could even see that he was there, smiling like a fool and swinging the broken lock around his finger as if it were entirely a game. Maybe Hunter made it too easy, maybe he fell for whatever trick this boy was setting up. Blight's are *sneaky*, he reminds himself.

A sharp blow of wind drifts behind him, and he can feel the presence of someone, just out of his peripheral. The corner of his lip twitches upwards.

"Boo-!" Edric says, hand reaching for his shoulder. Hunter cuts him off, swiftly reaching behind

him, taking his wrist and flipping him easily over his shoulder, but grabs him again before his back hits the ground. Edric's feet are planted into the ground, but it's Hunter's grasp keeping him from falling.

Edric looks dazily up at him, blinking with surprise. Hunter smiles like he's about to laugh, then let's go, Edric shouldering the ground with a “ *Oof!*”

“Show off,” Edric groans and sits up, rubbing where he hit the ground.

Hunter fights a snort and offers a hand, pulling Edric up to his feet. “If I were anyone else, you'd be actually hurt. Or arrested. You should learn to defend yourself better.”

Ed shrugs, indifferent. “I'm done with the night market. What would I need to defend myself from?”

Hunter looks at him a little confusedly, like it hadn't occurred to him Edric didn't need to know protection. He catches himself staring and looks away, letting his back fall against the alley wall. “I'm just saying. Peace is temporary and things are changing, fast. Magic won't always save your ass, it's good to know how to fight.”

“I think I'm pretty good at fighting, you just caught me by surprise is all,” Edric flicks Hunter's forehead with a smirk, and Hunter returns him an unimpressed look.

Hunter goes to say something else, but decides against it, instead focusing on the task at hand. “We doing this or not?” He motions to the exit of the alley. “This was your idea, anyways.”

“You did come to me, though,” Edric says with a sort of triumph. “You wanted recruits for the emperor's coven, so I'm humoring you.”

“What does *that* mean?”

“Your plan won't work,” Edric tells him. “But sneaking you into school is probably the most incredible idea I've ever had and I'll never pass up an opportunity to have fun.”

“You think this is... fun?”

“Hell yeah!” Edric beams, clapping his shoulder. Hunter tenses, but then relaxes under his hand, feeling the familiar electric warmth that he learned was always familiar with Edric. “Just uh- let's pretend we haven't met. In case you get found out, you know what I mean?”

Hunter nods as they continue out of the alley-way, toward the direction of the school.

“And if you see Luz or Amity-”

“Yeah, yeah, I'll steer clear. Did you get the uniform?”

“Right here,” Edric circles his finger and a bundle of clothing drops into his hands out of a ring of light. He tosses it into Hunter's face, looking amused. “They only had spare potions track, so roll with it. Act like you enjoy potions or something.”

“Great,” Hunter unfurls it and grins. “If I can do this, Darius will give me my cloak back! My respect back!”

Edric huffs through a smile. “You really think anyone at Hexside will wanna join? The emperor's coven doesn't have the best reputation there.”

“Of course! Who wouldn’t want to join?” Hunter beams. Edric gives him a look that Hunter pretends not to notice as they walk. It obviously crossed his mind that he could try giving Edric to the coven- he certainly has the magical potential- but that feels almost crossing a line. Their friends now, does Hunter really want to tamper with that? Would he want to put Edric through the vigorous training?

He’d find someone else, anyone else.

“Okay, whatever. It’s club-day and everyone’s out in the courtyard, so sneaking you in will be easy-peasy. Change in the bathroom and I’ll cover for you, ‘kay?”

It’s a short walk to school and just as Edric said, no one is inside the main hall. Hunter drinks it all in; he’s never been inside a school before and it’s hard not to stare at the tall corridors. The energy is much different than the palace or the training facilities, there are colorful posters and banners and lockers everywhere he looks, and it’s bigger than he thought.

“Bathrooms are this way, I can show you around later,” Edric takes him by his hand and leads him down one of the corridors, and Hunter tries to ignore the skip of heart and flushing of his face, going to say something but quickly clamping his mouth shut, instead focusing on his feet as they walk. *Don’t be an idiot. Left, right, left, right .*

“Ed! Hey, is that you?” a voice says at the end of the hall. Hunter freezes.

“Oh- Sup’ Jerbo!” Edric waves and sneakily spins his finger, tossing a wink over his shoulder to Hunter. Hunter looks down and sees his legs missing, his hands translucent as he waves them in front of his eyes.

“You coming to look at clubs?” The student asks, pausing where he stands to let Edric catch up to him.

“Yeah, I got held up but I thought I’d come check it out,” He walks towards his friend, but one of his hands stays behind his back, his index finger jabbing to the left in an attempt to be discreet. *Guess I have to find it myself .*

He looks to the left as Edric and his friend leave out through a side exit, the invisibility wearing off the second they turn a corner. He finds a sign for the bathroom and quickly slips in, giving himself a mini pep talk as he changes into the uniform.

It feels strange to see himself in the mirror, a school bathroom mirror at that. Apart from his eyebags and scar, he looks like a regular highschool kid. It’s a dangerous, tempting thought, the life he could have lived if he were anyone else. *It’s an honor to be the golden guard .*

He still finds himself frowning.

He leaves to find his way outside before he gets too caught up, pushing the fantasy away. That’s all it ever was anyways.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

"even as a child everyone would say
he was gonna be a star someday,
finally he found a way to reach the sky
but he didn't know what he'd find"

Chapter Notes

SORRY this took a very long time, school and drawing take a lot out of me so i havent had a lot of time to write. this one is also a little short so consider it a pt 2 to the last chapter. dont worry i am still going to update this the best I can

I'M SO EXCITED FOR THE NEW EPISODES

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"You really are an idiot, you know that?" Edric says, curtly, flicking Hunter's forehead even with the knowledge the dream dampens any kind of touch or pain. "Moron,"

The dream seems to be back in a forest, similar tall trees and surrounding undergrowth, but now it's clearer, covered in crystal white snow, when it was once a jungle. The sky is a daunting, endless blue, cloudless, and the sun is rising from over distant mountains, cutting through trees and spilling over the snow. It's wonderfully vivid, it almost feels real, the way the sun warms his back, air freezes his cheeks.

Hunter swallows as he lifts his eyes to meet Edric, who looks undoubtedly pissed. Hunter can't even focus on how he wants to reply, because Edric's face is basked in aureate sunlight, glowing in his eyes and making his green hair shine almost gold.

When their eyes meet, there's a tugging in his gut, this pull towards something unnameable, like birds flying south for the Winter.

Hunter bites his cheek to still a smile.

"Really? Nothing to say?" Edric takes a step closer, and Hunter wishes he didn't because his gut squirms and a chill cuts through him. "You put my sister's friends in trouble, man,"

Hunter looks back down, the familiar burn of shame washing against him. "I-I know. I really am sorry. I was..."

"Irrational?" Edric cuts in. "Stupid? Selfish?"

"Yes," Hunter says quickly. "And... Scared." He's grown into a habit of admitting to Edric when he's scared. He doesn't know why.

Edric's face softens a little, something entering his gaze that Hunter doesn't recognize. Edric looks down at their feet and Hunter can count every snowflake between his eyelashes, the way they shudder when he blinks.

When Edric says nothing, he feels the urge to explain further. "They were... I thought... I was told I would be replaced. If I didn't find any students. I thought I'd..." It feels daunting to describe, to give form.

"I'm sorry," Edric says softer. "I shouldn't be mad at you, it was my fault too for encouraging the whole idea. You had me worried, too. They could have gotten you in a lot of trouble,"

"You worried about me?" Hunter perks up.

"Dumbass, of course I am, that's what- friends do. But also friends don't exactly... act like dicks to each other, though, so I'm sorry for that. This dream is messing with my head."

Hunter blinks. "What do you mean?"

"It's like," Edric turns to where the sun is, the light fully basking his front. He looks at loss for words, memories dancing behind his eyes. "It just feels... It looks like the Knee, up here. But it's not."

"Right..." Hunter looks out to the skyline. They're clearly on a great rocky slope of some kind, but it's nowhere in the Boiling Isles. "And what's the significance?"

"This is where I always trained, you know? I guess I'm just used to being guarded when I'm-" Edric suddenly freezes mid-sentence, then whips around, face suddenly horrified. "Oh *titan!*"

Hunter becomes panicked for a second, hand going instinctively for the staff he doesn't have with him.

"I yelled at you right where my mom would yell at *me!*" Edric exclaims, a little dramatically, his hands tugging in his hair. "Oh Titan, I'm a terrible friend and a *terrible person!* That's what this dream location was telling me, I'm gonna turn out just like her!"

Hunter instinctively reaches for Ed's hands, and the moment he touches him, there's an instance it almost feels real. There's a thrill from somewhere within him, almost a song - the swell of something bright and warm when Edric lifts his head gently, wild-eyed and tense. He pulls Edric's hands away from his messy hair, gently holds them in front of them. Hunter lets the feeling have its way. He doesn't know if it's fear anymore, or something kinder, warmer.

Hunter attempts a smile, partly to ease himself. "You're not terrible, Edric. I don't know if I'd say you're anything less than incredible, actually." He says, trying to ignore the way his voice wavers and stammers. Somethings come over him to suddenly spell his honest thoughts, raw and uncoordinated. "You're like- this great thing that I don't know what I did to deserve. You're so likable and it's like you heal everything around you, make everything flourish -like the sun! And you just... You care so much about your sister and her friends... You make me want to make you care about me too, and I think sometimes you might do, and I don't know if I've ever had that... you know? You're an incredible person. To me, at least. Anyone else is crazy, I guess."

Edric blinks and his eyes water, a moment his eyes become shimmery and he yanks his head away, cheeks flushing. "I care about you," He chokes out, voice thick and gaspy, something miserable in his tone.

Hunter expects him to take a breath, dry his eyes with a watery smile, bashfully apologizing. And

then Hunter will tell him he doesn't mind, ask if he's okay, and Edric'll say yes because he doesn't know what he'd do if Edric wasn't okay, and they'll move on.

Edric does nothing of the sort, he just keeps crying.

His hands have moved back to cover his face, shoulders shaking. Hunter wants to reach out again, tell him it'll be okay. But he doesn't. The problem feels beyond him, somehow, like they're worlds apart and Edric is crying for something a lot deeper than Hunter would be able to understand.

Through a spread of fingers, Edric's eyes are spent and wild, the way a young child's are when in fear, fear beyond monsters in the closet or spiders or the dark. Something is terribly wrong, the eyes say, but it's too large for anyone to figure out.

Reality twists into focus with a hand on Edric's shoulder, like a reverse falling as his eyes snap open, panicked and alert. He could still feel the dream around him, like he was still in the chill of a snowy mountaintop.

The hand flinches away as he quickly sits up, a headache pulsing like a siren in his head, almost nauseatingly. He groans, then looks up, surprised to see his twin standing above his bed, hands at her hips. Golden light streams in through the windows, illuminating her silhouette, he's mildly annoyed to see the sun already almost completely up the sky.

"You certainly slept in," Emira smiles playfully, before meeting his gaze, and her face instantly drops, some sisterly instinct taking over. "Woah, are you okay?"

Edric squints, his face feeling heavy. "What?" His voice comes out awful sounding. Raw, hoarse.

"Your eyes are all red and puffy," She says, taking a seat beside him on his bed, her hand finding his shoulder. "Were you crying?"

Edric looks away, shamefully. He doesn't want to tell the truth, that he was crying in his sleep. But he doesn't know if he could fool her, if he even wants to lie to her. If anyone knows him better than he does, it's Em. But he doesn't want to explain to her, he can't sit there and try to convince her the golden guard isn't a bad person, that he's actually a boy his age, who he's heard laugh and joke, who is afraid, just like he is.

Who Edric cares about more than he desperately doesn't want to admit.

He also doesn't want to explain the chill of the snow, old memories, good and bad, cutting straight through him. Whiplash of cold terror. Old fear.

"It's nothing," He murmurs, even though it's everything. "I didn't sleep well last night, s'all"

"Okay," Emira says quietly, taking a breath against the tame hurt that he's lying to her. "Well, I'm still here if you ever want to talk. I hurt when you do. Even if I find out late."

Edric feels like choking on air is the next logical step if he isn't careful. *You can't tell her.*

"Thank you," He nods his head once, eyes trained away.

There's a beat of silence before she says, in a new, lighter voice, "Luz says Mittens needs our help. She's skipping coven tryouts for the brawl."

Edric takes a deep breath, hoping it's quiet enough not to be made into something more, then looks back up, a crooked smile conjured on his face.

He's scared, he realizes, his hands tremble against the edge of his sheets and he's having a hard time keeping eye contact. Emira stares back, knowingly. He doesn't know why he bothers trying to keep anything from her. Even when they were younger she's always been the one to drag him to his feet, to tell bullies off, to comfort him and say *Mom didn't mean it, she just wants us to grow. I know it isn't fair.*

He always tried to be there for Emira too, but she always seemed to push him away and suffer by herself, like she'd *rather* suffer alone than fall apart in front of him. Maybe it's the years of acting like the older sibling when she never even had to, just because Edric was weak.

He feels weightful, guilty. He takes another breath through the wash of pain.

Finally he says. "What does she need?"

He hopes that's enough, he just wants it to be enough.

Chapter End Notes

also i finished writing this up before i took the time to finish my ap psychology project
thats due tomorrow and worth like 20 percent of my already failing grade
PRIORITIES PEOPLE PRIORITIES

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

"Thats me in the corner
thats me in the spotlight
losing my religion"

Chapter Notes

ok this chapters technically unfinished but ill just add everything else next time

WERE GETTING CLOSE

Things are like this for a while: Edric dreams of nothing and wakes up with nothing, goes to school, listens to his mother, pretends not to see the occasional worried glances of his friends and sisters, and tries not to think of Hunter.

This is useless, he realizes. His fears have long been confirmed.

Edric realizes he can't manifest his dreams, couldn't predict when he meets Hunter and when he doesn't. Sometimes he'll dream of him, but it isn't really him, only a mindless clone his brains made up to carry out his mind's story. It's strange, he thinks, and he's only really begun to realize the bizarrry of it all, that something created in his head transcends the laws of space, that something connects him with Hunter that defies any kind of rule at all.

The times he does meet real-Hunter in a dream, they'll talk. About anything, everything. Edric likes hearing him speak, not about being in the Emperor's coven, or his experiences as a sixteen year old scout-head, but about things *he* thinks about; his opinions, likes, dislikes. Hunter wasn't allowed to talk to the other trainees when he was growing up, so Edric's the first to hear about a lot of him. Who he is inside.

Edric told him this, one night. "I think it's stupid, you know," he said. "That you have to be worrying about who you are, and your purpose, and titles. That isn't you. You're all the stuff beneath that, y'know? Am I the only one getting that? Has no one ever asked you about any of this?"

"You say this stuff a lot," Hunter noted. This particular dream, they were laying on their backs in a sunny field, under the glow of a blue sky. "A lot of my life is unfair to you,"

"It *is* unfair. All of it."

"I want to know then, who am I, do you think?" Hunter looked over at him, something playful in his voice, like he was expecting Edric to backtrack and awkwardly refuse the question. "What

makes me, me?"

"Jeez, I don't know. You're Hunter. You're funny. You get upset easily, especially if the other person is upset. Your favorite colors are red and green because they remind you of things you like, but specific shades you hate. You like true red, like the color of Flapjack, but can't stand that dark, almost brown ruby color because you associate it with blood. On the other hand, you hate vibrant green, and prefer muted and colder tones. Green reminds you of flyer derby, something that is yours and not Belos's, and you like it even more because of that. You like feeling a part of things. You have fun in a challenge when the stakes aren't high enough to lose yourself in. You hate nicknames because you feel they lessen your control. Being in control of a situation is also important to you at times, except when you're with me. You don't like when people stand behind you. You-

"You're just listing off stuff you learned about me," Hunter turned his head away, addressing his words to the sky. "I don't know if that makes me who I am,"

"Maybe not," Edric shrugged. "I didn't mean you were the facts. I meant more, you're the stuff *behind* it. The heart. If that makes sense."

"It doesn't,"

Edric smiled and exhaled out of his nose. "I don't know if I could explain it any better if I could. Could you give me a better answer, then? Who I am?"

This made Hunter silent for a moment, Edric heard him take a breath. "I guess not,"

"Try,"

Hunter stilled, and Edric could almost feel him tense up beside him, even though they were in a dream and could not feel anything.

"You're... passionate. About everything. Your family, your friends, keeping them safe. It's a little annoying sometimes, but- it's also... nice. I've learned everyone seems to have an impact on you, every person you meet stays with you, in a way. You feel things very deeply. Sometimes you apologize for things that aren't your fault, and you seem to carry a lot of regrets and guilt. You like physical affection, but are scared to ask for it most of the time. You feel awkward receiving gifts. You like caring for animals and writing poetry. Sometimes you act... romantic to purposely confuse people. You like to make trouble for people, but you never get any real punishment. Illegal activity doesn't bother you for some reason, and neither does life-threatening danger. You have sisters who care about you and friends besides me, but oftentimes you pretend you are completely alone. When I voice my annoyances with you -"

"Okay well now you're just listing things you don't like about me," Edric snorted a laugh, propping himself on an elbow to look over at Hunter. "I was trying to be nice with yours,"

"You're the annoying parts of you too," Hunter shrugged. "As I am the bad parts of me."

This made Edric hold his response, and he leaned back against the grass, in thought.

Softly, Hunter added. "But- that's not bad, right? I'm not-... not evil, right?"

"No," Edric said at once, almost instinctively. "And I'm not *all* annoying to you, right?"

Hunter had stifled a laugh, Edric's heart lurching. "I think even when you're annoying, it's not annoying. If that makes sense." He looked over then, with a smile, eyes meeting in a rush. Their

faces were close enough now that their noses could graze, and when Hunter pushed a breath out of his nose, Edric could feel it like a breeze against the side of his face.

Edric jolted his head away, heart thumping furiously in his chest. It was only a dream, of course, it wasn't real and it shouldn't *feel this real*.

Hunter sat up, confusedly peering over his friend's face. "Why'd you do that?"

"Sorry, I don't know, the sun was in my eyes," Edric mumbled. But he knew well enough.

It's a school day morning when he comes downstairs with Emira, this tugging in his gut, and his own voice comes into his head, a promise he made a million years ago *I'll look for you, if you look for me*. He found him, of course. And now there was this looming, daunting question; *now what?*

When he realized this, he felt a stirring in his stomach, like a gut feeling something was *wrong*, and all throughout breakfast and getting ready and leaving his house to go to school, he couldn't shake it. It was like bracing for a bad report card when he was young, going the walk home like he could already sense what was waiting for him once he got in the house, the turn of events that would follow.

His mother hardly talks to him or Emira anymore aside from the occasional "*are you keeping up with your studies?*". She's far too busy with Blight Industries, even more-so on the weekdays, so Edric usually never has to worry about slipping up in front of her. His father makes more of an effort to communicate, even if it's hard for him. He supposes his little sister was to thank for that, after the events of the brawl.

So then why was he bracing? There was no hand coming to curtly slap him after making a wrong move, there wasn't a disappointed glare or even a silent treatment, there was nothing.

The feeling was dizzying, maybe a little choking. Like swarming lights. It stayed with him all day, like he's settled into a fog- or a fogs settled into him, keeping him from thinking of anything else.

Everytime Hunter somehow crosses his mind, the feeling thickens, takes shape into worry. He's worried about Hunter and he doesn't know why. The last dream he'd had with Hunter, he seemed fine. Normal.

Was he?

Edric's notices himself doing things to fill the absence of Hunter. With the Day of Unity approaching, Hunter is always busy and his guard is always up, so Edric hasn't seen him in real life since the flyer derby incident.

For one, he talked to Willow about flyer derby a few days prior.

"You want to join?" She'd asked, caught a little off-guard, Edric having stopped her on her way to the cafeteria. Edric only really knows Willow because of Amity, she'd been around their house lots as little kids, and even when they stopped, Edric and Emira still made a point to be friendly to her when they could.

"You're missing a person, right?" Edric shrugged. "I figured I could replace Hunter if you need someone,"

“Hunter?” Willow blinked. “You know Ca- Hunter?”

“What-?” Edric’s face flushed. *When did I say that?*

“You know his name,” She explained. “He didn’t tell us his real one until just before he left. And you weren’t even there,”

“I- uhh,” Edric scrambled for an answer, panic brightening on his face. There was no real reason to lie to Willow, she’s sort of Hunter’s friend now. Unlike his sisters, Willow wouldn’t interrogate him or get angry and overprotective. He really could tell her and it wouldn’t be made into a thing.

“It’s- it’s a long story,” He had settled for.

“Another day then,” Willow smiled brightly. “And yeah, we were actually about to ask around for another flyer, you’d be a big help if you want to try-out,”

And that was that. Try-outs were soon if he still wanted to join, and he was pretty good at flying, having been using a spare staff for a few years.

When he gets to school, he and Emira had already planned to go into the office to enter multitracks, and the feeling of seeing his sleeves turning for the beast and potions track is enough to temporarily distract him from everything. Emira entered healing, partly to have classes with Viney, but she’d been practicing on her own before multitracks were even a thing.

One of Gus’ friends, Mattholomule, had gone with them for courage, the boy entering illusion alongside construction. Edric never had a chance to talk to him before, construction tracks being so different from illusion, and the fact that Edric's four years older than him.

When they get out the door, Edric grins, spreading his arms out to show his sleeves to his sister, and she offers a high five in excited approval before following Mattholomule down the hall.

When he goes to follow behind, the feeling is suffocating, suddenly. It hits him all at once and his breath catches his throat, stomach lurching, like he might vomit. He puts his hand over his mouth.

Emira stops when he does, turning around. “You okay, Ed?”

Edric nods, and swallows thickly, putting his hand down. “Yeah. Just lightheaded,”

“Eat something bad?” She comes up beside him and places a hand on his back, guiding him to start walking again.

“Probably, but I’ll be fine,” Ed replies, weakly, attempting a reassuring grin.

He looks behind him once, the door closing against the silhouette of someone else in the room.

///

Everything is in ruins.

Belos lied to him, has been lying to him forever. The day of Unity, who Belos was, who his family was, who *Hunter* was. The golden guard is dead. He was always dead and Hunter was nothing, less than nothing.

Hunter is a grimwalker.

A clone.

Nothing.

He digs his nails into his hairline for the millionth time since that night, curling furiously into himself. Memories pulse in and out, of being in Belos' head, the flashes of his face and the fear throbbing in Hunter's chest. His breath comes hard and thick, sobs shaking through him uncontrollably.

He shouldn't cry. He needs a plan, he needs to *think*. He used to be so good at thinking. He's temporarily hiding in Hexside, mainly because it was the only place he could think of that no one would look for him there, and the memories made it feel almost safe. Flyer derby and Willow and Gus, the way they forgave him, the fun he had with them. He had friends now, multiple!

And Edric.

His chest aches when he remembers. Titan, he's going to hate him when he finds out what Hunter is, what he's been helping.

And yet, he wants nothing more than for him to be next to him, he wants to wake up and see him with his stupid smirk and outstretched hand, probably saying something dumb and snarky like "*you drool in your sleep*". He'd considered looking for him at school, but that was risky, and he didn't know how Ed would react.

Hunter lets out a breath of frustration, *why* did he have to get close to him? Why couldn't he have forgotten that dream and just arrested him in the alley-way? Why did they even have to meet at all?

Hunter shouldn't have existed, none of his line of clones should have.

How can he forgive himself for everything he was planned to become? For the things he did? The hurt he's caused?

Everything is wrong. So, *so* wrong.

Flapjack chirps unhappily in his ear, curling up into the crook of his shoulder. Hunter takes a steadying breath, scratching the bird's little head with a finger. At least he has Flapjack.

He's decided he needs to tell someone about the Day of Unity, he *can't* let it happen. Luz was in there with him, and there's no doubt in his mind she'll be making a plan anytime now with the help of the Owl Lady.

That's good, a start.

He also doubts it will be enough. He also is sure someones going to get hurt. Killed. Multiple people. Maybe everyone.

Edric's face flashes in his mind, a snippet of his smile, and then him laying down at Hunter's feet. Still, radiating cold, eyes unseeing. The feeling that follows is immeasurable. How much is this going to take?

If it's what it'll take, he'll take down Belos himself.

End Notes

I had to get this out of my system

check out my insta and tiktok for arttttt

@catcoonxd

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